In high school I took this beginning debate class where the whole class was the teacher telling us about various topics and asking for our opinions on them. One day we were talking about the concept of the metaverse. I feel like back in that period (2018), virtual reality was what everyone was worried about regarding technology taking over. Like those Snapchat sunglasses. I suspect some of that died over the pandemic with everything being forced online and people realizing it sucked. Now fears about technology are all about AI. But in those days, the Black Mirror episodes were about people living in parallel virtual worlds, whether to be free with their lover past death or to get back at those who had done them wrong in the "real" world.

The teacher was explaining to us the concept of if there were infinite virtual worlds, how do we know that we are living in the "real," non-virtual one? The base world? The idea was, if we could create a virtual reality world that was completely indistinguishable from the one we experience currently, where we experience our full range of feelings and senses and everything, who's to stop anyone from making infinite worlds like that. And who's to say any of the virtual worlds are not real – when a person feels their whole human experience within them? And if through code and data centers and whatnot we can create completely sentient new worlds, who's to say our current reality is the "base," "real" world—how do we know this one isn't just a simulation someone created?

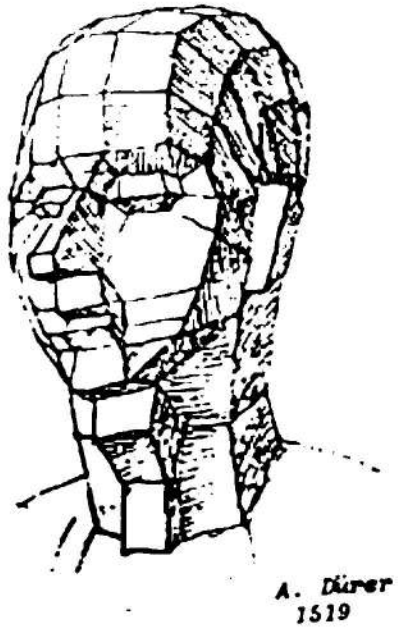
I had never even seen The Matrix at this point, so safe to say this concept blew my mind. I had debate class first period, so for the rest of the day my eyes were wide and I was looking at everyone funny. Lately, whenever I put the phone down after doomscrolling and observe my surroundings, the physical world, I feel like the shot in one of those Black Mirror episodes of the person with a VR headset or chip in their head, with their body completely limp even as they're living in their mind. Going on my phone, there's a whole world in there, there's all the subcultures and community spaces this magazine speaks of, which you can travel through and participate in and observe without even lifting a finger (just maybe your thumb). It just makes me think of how, usually the answer to why total-immersion virtual reality isn't "real" is that it's just happening in your head, that it doesn't have any physical reality.

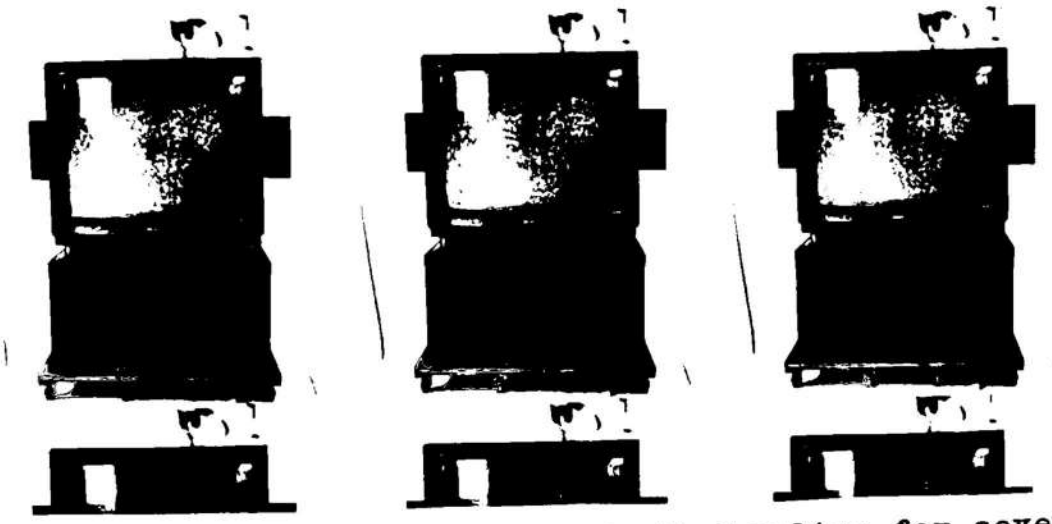
Whenever I watch old movies, or ones set in the pre-Internet period, I'm always struck by how everything the characters do has a physical aspect to it. I think about their daily routine compared to mine as a student; they go to class, open a notebook, take out their pen and write down notes (maybe their hand cramps from writing so fast), they go to the library to check out books using the card catalog, they take their typewritten paper out of their bag to hand to the professor. What I mean is that, almost every action used to require some sort of physical thing you had to do. Even our app symbols signify processes or actions that used to by physical – a camera, mail, files, the Settings gear. But with computers, there's so many things you can do, people you can meet, places you can go, and it's kind of all just happening in your head. You visit these places and complete these tasks inside the Internet, but the Internet doesn't have a place. It's not physical at all. It's this omnipresent immaterial other world that we've created. That we're all just interacting with with our head, without our physical body.

I guess the closest thing to this experience pre-Internet would be reading. Your mind is taken to a completely new place even as your body just sits there. Or maybe having a meaningful conversation. Or being deep in thought, daydreaming. Professor-like stuff. You would think that with this endless stimulation of solely our minds, it would make our minds sharper. As someone who (humble brag) studies the history of technology, the origins of computers have always been insane to me. What do you mean humans were able to create completely new worlds with just math and electricity? I can't wrap my head around how people can wrap their head around that. How people are that smart. So I find it ironic that with this output of insane human intelligence that is large language models, people use them to cease critical thinking at all. Apparently one of the markers of modernity (the modernity which means post-Industrial Revolution) is society developing a degree of complexity that its impossible for you to be an expert in everything you encounter in everyday life – in medicine, architecture, your natural environment – you now have to pick something to become an expert in throughout your life because there's now too much information and complexity to understand everything.

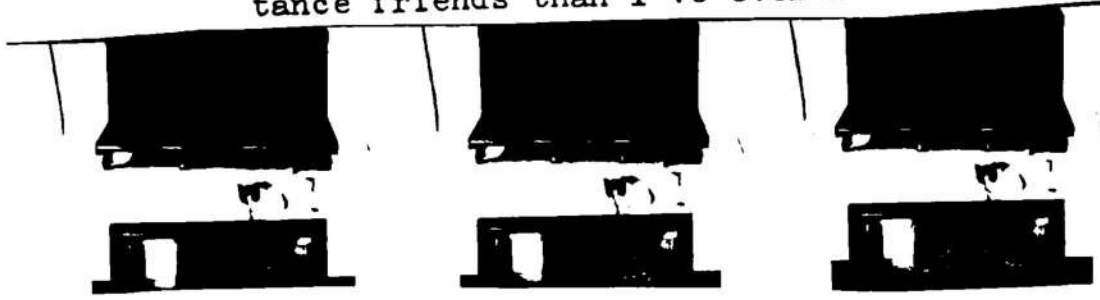
Sometimes I feel like I lack common sense. And while people have called me absent-minded, sometimes I feel like spending so much of life outside the physical world has something to do with it. I feel like having to do everything physically on a daily basis, writing a letter and having to make sure the pen didn't smear and the address was legible and how much you could stuff the envelop before it would rip in the mail; having to load a camera with film and understand the lighting so nothing goes to waste and develop the film and make sure not to lose the photograph because it's your only one; needing to know basic medical and car stuff because there's no way to look something up or the ability to call anyone; I feel like these things give you a natural sense of cause and effect, of the basic science encountered in everyday life.

But now the people who created LLMs don't even know completely how they work. Much less the average person or me. So I feel like I don't really know how anything in the world works – definitely not the computer world – but also, I feel a disconnect and detachment from the physical world and its workings. But both I just kind of glide through, hoping others will take care of the details. Virtual reality hasn't reached the physical immersion point yet, those other dimensions haven't been completed yet, but I feel like I'm already kind of living in my head.

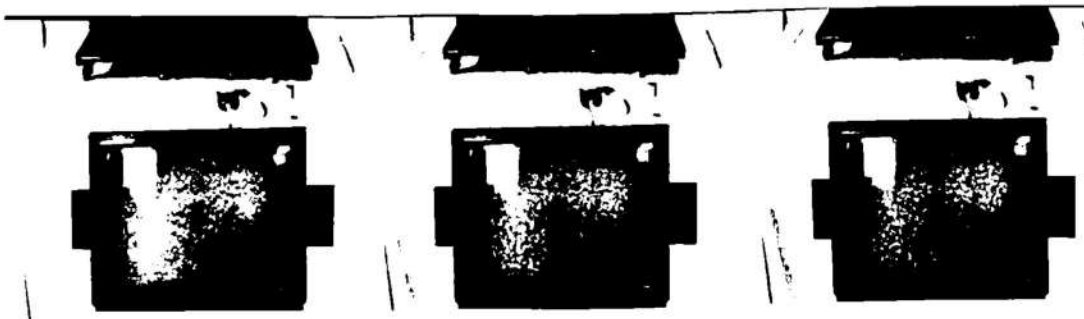




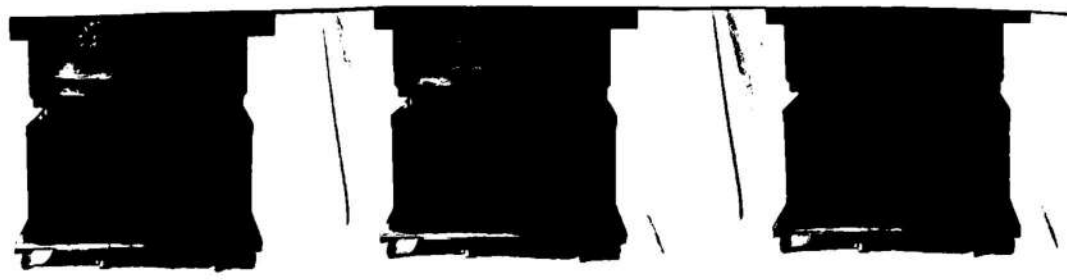
I've been living in North Carolina for seven months now. Moving out of Florida means that I've got more long distance friends than I've ever had before.



I'm also the most offline I've ever been , which I didn't anticipate. I guess the cyber world has always freaked me out... I haven't had social media since I was 20 years old and I'm 23 now. That also means that I haven't seen their facesin months.



When I was living in Tallahassee, I would write about my life, the way my bedroom window looked, the kind of music I liked in the winter. I'd put it on RateYourMusic lists, which ultimately felt way too public as time passed.
I guess now that I'm living in North Carolina I want to hear from my friends via the pen and CDx cross country CD swaps. And I can tell them what I've been up to in the meantime. :)



honestly i dont consider myself a part of that community bc its mostly degenerates and now has these industry plants and just weird to interact with

finding someone decent and worth their salt is a dime a dozen

not in any gcs or servers or anything, i just like having a character bc its cool to me

Sun 3:46 PM

What made you get into it in the first place?

i dont remember exactly. for sure i always thought the art was cool and theres some chill people to talk to

reading wolves of the beyond and guardians of gahoole and such during middle school probably had an impact lmao

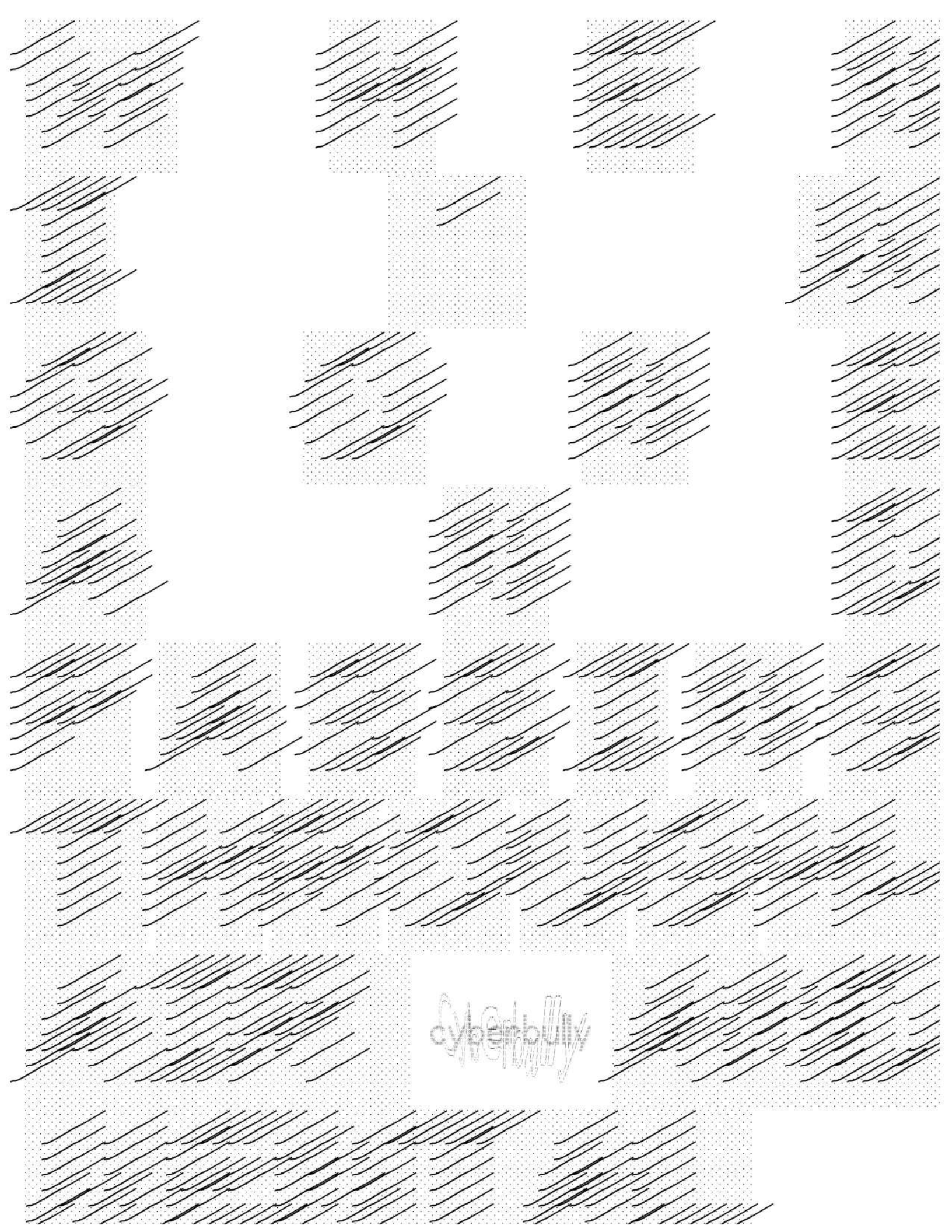
and being a sonic fan back then

Was there a specific instance of when you decided to not be in the furry community anymore?

replied to you

definitely a buildup, but one specific instance there was this social app i had a few years back. in short i put in one of my interests "weightlifting," to which this individual thought itd be appropriate to ask me for body pics. keep in mind i met this person roughly 30 minutes ago. but there are some genuinely good people out there in that community and you just gotta know how to discern between them

ANECDOTES IN ORDER: FLORA D. OLIVER H. ANONYMOUS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